

# **SIKKIM TOURISM UNLOCK 1.0**

## **STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES/GUIDELINES**

**FOR**

**REOPENING OF STATE TOURISM**

**w.e.f. 10<sup>Th</sup> October 2020**



**Department of Tourism & Civil Aviation  
Government of Sikkim  
Paryatan Bhawan, Gangtok**

## INTRODUCTION

COVID 19 Pandemic has brought about a paradigm shift in the design and characteristics of the tourism industry. Now, with health and safety as the primary concern, the only path that can lead the industry back to its revival, is through re-assurance of guaranteed health safety of the visiting tourists/travellers as well as the host population of the state.

Tourism being one of the core revenue industry with about 15 % of the population directly or indirectly dependent on it, the state cannot afford to abrogate its tourism industry for long. The resumption of tourism, on the otherhand is likely to increase the probability of disease transmission in the state to a much higher level. Hence, it becomes imperative for us to ensure that the highest standards of health safety measures are put in place before we open the doors for tourism in the state.

Considering the present scenario, it is felt necessary to take a restrictive approach (supply determined rather than market driven) for phase wise reopening of tourism in the state. The reopening of tourism under Sikkim Tourism Unlock 1.0 has therefore been planned under following broad objectives:

- Rebuilding the image of the State as a “Safe Destination” with an efficient Tourist Health Safety management System.
- Restructuring the industry operations with digital intervention in order to ensure effective tourist tracking/ monitoring mechanisms and database management.
- Regulate the tourism industry of the state with well defined and simplified Guidelines and SOPs in order to ensure the delivery of safe and hassle free experience for the tourists in the state.

Further, a state level Tourism Task Force has been constituted vide Notification no:281/DOT&CAV dated 23/09/2020 which has been primarily entrusted with the responsibility to review and finalize the SOPs, formulate the procedures for empanelment of the stakeholder enterprises and oversee the process of reopening of Sikkim Tourism Unlock 1.0.

### **Classification of Guidelines in this document:**

Based on the nature of tourism industry in Sikkim and with respect to COVID-19 preparedness, the specific guidelines have been prepared under following focus areas–

#### **A. Principle Guidelines**

#### **B. General Guidelines for Tourism Service Providers**

#### **C. Additional desirable guidelines .**

## “A”

### PRINCIPLES GUIDELINES:

#### A (I): Tourists visiting Sikkim.

As Sikkim Tourism is gearing up for phase-wise opening of the tourism sector, the present guidelines will be applicable to tourists visiting the state during the 1st Phase of Sikkim Tourism Unlock 1.0. The guidelines will be issued for subsequent phases of opening of other tourism sector in the State, till such time, any person intending to visit Sikkim will be subjected to extant protocols under this guidelines. In addition, it is the responsibility of hotels Travel Agents/ Tour Operators and other tourism establishments in the state to ensure that the tourists adhere to the guidelines provided in this document, while providing services to them. **While these guidelines are obligatory on all the tourists, any instructions issued by the State Government or other Competent Authorities from time to time will be binding and will override the provisions in this document and must be strictly complied with.** In order to have a hassle-free entry into the state, all the tourists are required to be aware of the following:

- i. The First phase re-opening will be considered for domestic tourists and the foreign nationals residing in India only.
- ii. A tourist must possess a valid A COVID- Negative certificate, issued within 72 hours prior to date of arrival by Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) authorized labs/hospitals situated within the country.
- iii. A Tourist must compulsorily register in the Sikkim Tourism Web Portal before travelling to Sikkim and a copy of “Travel Card” issued on the basis of tourist registration should be carried at all times of travel in Sikkim.
- iv. All tourist travel in Sikkim must be pre booked with the accommodation units & Travel Agents/ Tour Operators empanelled with the department of Tourism & Civil aviation, Govt of Sikkim
- v. Tourists should ensure that their travel card is updated in the web portal as and when required.
- vi. All tourists travelling to Sikkim must carry a valid proof of identification.
- vii. Persons above 65 years of age, persons with co morbidities, pregnant women and children below the age of 10 years are advised to either avoid completely or limit their travel. While travelling, they are advised to take extra precautions.
- viii. All Tourists travelling to Sikkim should carry their own set of protective gears, such as face mask/faceshields, gloves and hand sanitizers and thermometers..

#### A (II): Accommodation Sector:

- i. **Empanelment:** All accommodation units desirous of resuming their operations during Unlock 1.0 must comply with the existing COVID 19 guidelines/protocols and must

complete the registration of their units in the Sikkim Tourism Web Portal and be GST compliant to get empanelled under the department of Tourism and Civil Aviation.

- ii. **Room Reservations:** The accommodation units shall not take any reservation from the tourists who has not registered in the Web Portal.
- iii. **Containment Zones:** No hotels/ home stays in the notified containment zones will be permitted to operate.
- iv. **Occupancy:** The guest occupancy in the accommodation units shall be governed by the latest instructions of Government of India.
- v. **Emergency isolation facility:** The permitted accommodation units to designate and prepare at least one room for emergency isolation for emergency management of any suspected cases.
- vi. **Compliance:** The accommodation units- non compliant to the standard protocols issued by Health Department and SOP issued by Department of tourism and Civil Aviation shall not be permitted for operations during the Unlock 1.0.

**A.(III) Travel Agents/ Tour Operators/ Transport**

- i. All Travel Agents/ Tour Operators desirous of resuming their operations during Unlock 1.0 must complete the registration of their units in the Sikkim Tourism Web Portal and get themselves empanelled under the department of Tourism and Civil Aviation Web Portal.
- ii. The empanelled travel agents/ tour operators shall upload the guest's details, tour itinerary (arrival to departure), accommodation details, the vehicle and driver details in the Web portal of the department for every tour during the Unlock 1.0
- iii. The travel agencies must ensure that all tourists entering Sikkim should carry a copy of Travel Card issued by the Department of Tourism and the travel agent's/tour operator's booking slip.
- iv. The Travel Agents/ Tour operators may if necessary, engage tourist vehicles from outside Sikkim only for arrival transfer to Sikkim, however, it shall be the responsibility of the local travel agents/tour operators to ensure that the such vehicles strictly comply to the SOPs and guidelines of the state of Sikkim. The concerned local travel agents shall be held liable in the event of violation of the SOPs by such vehicles.
- v. The empanelled travel agent/s tour operators shall in no case engage proxy operators to conduct their tours.
- vi. The seating capacity of all tourist vehicles shall be as per the prevailing specifications of the Transport Department, Government of Sikkim.
- vii. The travel agents/ tour operators, non compliant to the standard protocols of Health Department and the SOPs issued by the Department of Tourism and Civil Aviation shall be dealt under relevant provisions of the Disaster Management Act 2005.
- viii. The Tour Operators/ Travel Agents may introduce the option of Travel Insurances for their guests.

## **“B”**

### **GENERAL GUIDELINES/ STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES**

These guidelines/SOP are prepared in consideration to the nature of tourism industry in the state and precautions required by various tourism related businesses / stakeholders, while also taking into consideration the guiding principles / SOPs issued by the authorities as mentioned below:

- COVID-19 safety and hygiene guidelines for Tourism Sector (Hospitality Units) by Ministry of Tourism, Govt. of India (MOT) dated May 2020.
- Operational Recommendations for Tourism Service Providers by Ministry of Tourism, Govt. of India (MOT) vide D.O. No. 1/DG(T)/HRDiv./2020 dated 8th June 2020

#### **B: (I) For Tourists:**

While all tourism stakeholders in the state shall take necessary steps to implement the measures outlined in these guidelines, it is important for tourists to take adequate precautions to ensure their own health and safety. It shall be encouraged that the tourists make themselves aware of the prevailing rules and regulations in context to COVID-19.

- i. All tourists shall be briefed on the dos and don'ts at their pre-booked accommodation units or tour operators / tourist transport, the Tourists may need to follow basic screening procedures (like temperature check) and hygiene protocols (use of mask and hand sanitizers) before using the said services. which should be mandatorily followed during their entire stay in Sikkim.
- ii. Tourists should be advised not to visit areas falling within containment zone.
- iii. As far as possible, a zero-contact policy should be followed at all tourism facilities and Tourists shall minimize contact with service providers and other tourists.
- iv. Tourists should avoid handling cash as much as possible. All payments should be done through digital modes.
- v. While travelling all tourist should wear a face mask and carry their own sanitizer and wet wipes for personal use.
- vi. Tourists should strictly observe social distancing norms with a physical distance of 2 meters (6 feet) per person. Family groups can stay together as long as they ensure that are at least 2 meters (6 feet) away from any other individuals or family groups.
- vii. Tourists should ensure that they wear a protective face mask while within the premises of any tourism destination.
- viii. Tourists should follow respiratory etiquettes and avoid spitting in public places.
- ix. Tourists having an abnormal temperature and / or flu like symptoms shall not be allowed to enter the facility / activity premises. The service provider shall note down

- their contact details of such tourists and shall notify relevant health or administration authorities for acting on necessary Government protocols.
- x. Any tourist displaying potential COVID-19 symptoms and the people accompanying the said tourist shall be moved to an isolation room for further action.

**B: (II) For Accommodation Units:**

- i. ARRIVAL
- Sticker/Flag/Standee reading “Unlock 1.0” to be placed at conspicuous space.
  - Sanitizers to be available at the front porch.
  - Guest temperature to be checked at the entrance.
  - Baggage handlers, security staff to mandatorily wear masks, gloves & protective gears.
  - Baggage to be sanitized before entering the Hotel/Homestay building.
  - Self-parkingshould be encouraged.Incase of valetparking,the staff assigned to park the vehicles should wear mask and gloves.
- ii. CHECK IN
- Floor markers to be used in the reception area to ensure social distancing.
  - Counters to be arranged as per social distancing with hand sanitizing station.
  - The accommodation units are encouraged to use digital check in to reduce contact.
  - Check in formalities to be completed with one person at a time.
  - The Travel Card & Covid Negative Certificates to be verified at the reception.
  - Reception staff to wear protective gloves, mask, face shield while on active duty.
  - Discourage cash payments at the counter, digital payments to be practiced.
  - Extra stock of sanitizers, gloves, masks to be available at the reception for the guest in case.
- iii. LOBBY
- Furniture layout in the lobby to be aligned as per social distancing norms.
  - Lobby area to be sanitized by misting of Virucidal disinfectant frequently.
  - Remove newspapers, magazines from public areas. Instead, accommodation units are encouraged to use digital options such as subscription to e-newspapers, etc.
  - Do& Don'ts should be displayed at various public areas.
  - Emergency numbers should be displayed in the reception.
- iv. WASHROOM / ELEVATORS & STAIRCASES
- Siderails of the staircases to be sanitized frequently.
  - Elevators to allow only 50% of its actual capacity
  - Critical touch points, door knobs, handles to be sanitized frequently.
  - Antiviral wipes, hand wash and sanitizers to be available in all washrooms.
  - Public area wash room will be sanitized in high frequency
- v. GUEST ROOMS:
- All hotel staff entering the guest rooms will wear their protective gears.
  - Room will be thoroughly sanitized and serviced once a day.

- For air conditioning the guidelines of CPWD & Ministry of Health Department Govt. of India shall be followed .Setting of all air conditioning devices should be in range of 24-30 C. Relative humidity should be in the range of 40-70%.
  - The room allocation to the guest shall be made in line with the social distancing norms – preferably one room apart (alternative rooms)
- vi. RESTAURANTS
- Numbers of table & layout will be altered to maintain social distance 6ft distance is maintained
  - Self-service buffet to be discouraged as far as possible.. Ala carte menu to be actively encouraged in all restaurants
  - The guests present at the restaurant at any point of time must not exceed 50% of the actual capacity.
  - F&B staff to wear all mandatory protective gear while serving guest.
  - Banquet bookings to not take more than 50 guests at a time.
- vii. FOOD PRODUCTION
- Cutlery, crockery, and glassware processing will be in accordance to HACCP & FSSAI Guidelines.
  - Entire kitchen will be cleaned and sanitized frequently with hospital grade disinfectant as per HACCP Guideline.
  - Food production staff will wear mandatory protective gear at all time.
  - Local wellness-oriented menu selection are included for a healthier meal and to boost immunity
- viii. SALON, SPA & FITNESS CENTRE
- All styling equipment will be sanitized post every guest use.
  - Disposable apron, towel and napkins will be introduced.
  - Close contact service (like threading, facial etc) not to be resumed during unlock 1.0.
  - Spa and swimming pool facilities not to be opened during unlock 1.0
- ix. FITNESS CENTRE
- Social distancing will be practiced by all trainers with guests.
  - Layout changes will be done to ensure physical distancing.
  - Equipment will be thoroughly sanitized post every usage.
  - Guest and trainers will be requested to wear protective gear while using the facilities
  - Children’s play areas (wherever applicable) shall remain closed.
- x. STAFF
- Ensure all staff wear mask & gloves which should be changed/disinfected after handling each customer to avoid cross contamination.
  - Staff must use a tray to avoid hand contact to avoid contamination.
  - Emergency PPE should be made available for the staff.
  - Every hotel employee should wear shoes. Shoes should not be opened while cleaning the property. It is advised to wear a disposable shoe cover while cleaning.
- xi. IN CASE GUEST DEVELOPES SYMPTOMS OF COVID
- Refer B(viii): *Protocols for handling Covid suspected/positive cases.*

### **B: (III) Tour Operators & Travels Agents**

#### **i. OFFICE PREMISES**

- All touch points like door handles, counter tops, tabletops, railings etc, are cleaned continuously using a sanitizer/ disinfectant.
- Keep washrooms/restrooms clean and hygienic with regular cleaning
- Emergency contact numbers should be displayed at all office rooms,
- Ensure availability of hygiene and sanitation equipment such as germicidal disinfectants /hand sanitizers/masks/ disposable gloves/ disposable waste bags
- Ensure all staff wear masks and practice social distance and hygiene within the office premises.
- The contact details of all walk-in guests at the offices (even for enquiries) to be recorded.
- Social distancing protocols to be followed by the tourists in visiting TA's/TO's Offices.
- Those employees including the tourist transport drivers/guides who are in frequent touch with guests may be tested for COVID periodically.
- All employees must mandatorily download Aarogya Setu app in their mobile phones.

#### **ii. BOOKINGS:**

- Travel Agents to inform the guests about the mandatory prerequisites -“Tourist Registration/ Travel Card” and COVID Negative Certificates for all travel to Sikkim, which is to be cross verified at various service delivery points upon their arrival.
- Travel Agents to clearly communicate/brief the tourists on the dos and don'ts and the standard protocols to be followed by the tourist during their travel/stay in Sikkim.
- All travel bookings/confirmation/ service vouchers and invoices to be provided on an online/ digital mode to the guests and reduce paper transactions.
- Travel Agents/ Tour Operators to preferably use the same vehicle(s) for the whole tour and avoid change of vehicles in between the tours unless in case of breakdown/exigencies.
- Small group tours recommended with maximum 10 - 15 people for ease of implementing social distancing.
- If any tourist is found symptomatic or tests COVID- 19 : **Refer B(viii)**

### **B: (IV) Tourist Transport/ Drivers/Guides:**

- Greet 'Namaste', avoid shaking of hands and physical contacts.
- Drivers should wear mask /face shields and disposable gloves while on active duty.
- All tourist transport vehicles to have the Driver Name, Phone number and Driving License number displayed on the left hand side of the front screen.
- Ensure gloves are used while handling of luggage. Spray and wipe luggage handles.
- Check the tourists are carrying Travel Card & Valid COVID Negative Certificates.
- Drivers should brief the tourists on the dos and don'ts and the standard protocols to be followed by the tourist during their travel/stay in Sikkim.
- Ensure that all tourist are wearing masks and sanitizers before boarding the vehicle.
- All vehicles must be thoroughly disinfected prior to boarding of tourists.
- High touch areas (door handles, door locks, window buttons, door locks, windows, screens, etc.) should be sprayed with disinfectant surface cleaner regularly.
- Extra hand sanitizer, gloves, masks must be kept available in every vehicle.



- Use of disposable seat covers, head rest covers are recommended for all vehicles.
- Emergency numbers must be displayed on all vehicles
- Strictly follow trip itineraries with minimum layover at pre-determined stops only.
- Ensure all tourist have downloaded Aarogya Setu app.
- All vehicles must have garbage disposable bags.
- Health Department may give priority to drivers engaged in arrival and departure transfers and those staff engaged in constant touch with the visiting tourists for periodic testing
- for periodic testing of Sick or unwell tourist to be immediately taken for check –up to the nearest hospital in separate vehicle.

**B: (V) Tourist Spots /Attractions:**

- The management concerned to ensure hand washing facilities/sanitizers at entry point.
- Use floor markers to ensure social distancing norms are maintained.
- The management concerned to ensure every tourist are wearing mask.
- Maintain social distancing of 2 meters / 6 feet, allow small groups to avoid crowding.
- Display Do's & Don'ts and emergency contact numbers at a prominent place.
- Use proper garbage disposal system.
- Kitchen and dining areas of the cafeterias / eateries / fast food outlets needs to be cleaned and sanitized frequently with hospital grade disinfectant. Cafeterias should run only in 50% capacity .
- Parking area to be sanitized frequently and ensure social distancing norms are practiced in the parking lot.
- Avoid circulation of food menu and use poster menu or keep the menu under the glass tops of the dining tables.
- Staffs at cafeterias should practice clean hygiene, wear gloves and masks mandatorily.
- Keep the premises clean and ensure proper ventilation.

**B: (VI) Trekking:**

- All the trekkers need to pre book the trek before arrival in Sikkim.
- The treks will be permitted only through the empanelled agency registered with DOT& CAv.
- Dos and Don'ts shall be provided along with permit to the trekkers by the agencies concerned.
- The trekkers to preferably undergo a fitness screening in the nearest PHC before starting the trek..
- Social distancing to be maintained at all times during the trek
- Prefer using individual tents and avoid accommodating more than one person in a tent.
- Limit room capacity in the trekkers hut to not more than 3 persons .
- Use of separate Kitchen Tent to avoid crowding in the Trekkers hut kitchen is recommended.
- In case, any symptoms of COVID 19 develop to the trekkers while on the trek they shall immediately return from the trek and inform the District Administration/ Health Official at the base.
- Provision of Hand Wash, Sanitizer to be made compulsory at all the Camp Site/ Trekkers Hut at all entry, exit and common areas by the agency.

- All staff must wear Mask and hand gloves in the kitchen and while serving food.
- First Aid and oxygen can must be carried by the agency for safety of the trekkers
- Agency must be prepared for any emergency rescue and evacuations of the trekkers and inform Tourism and Civil Aviation Department district office.

**B: (VII) Paragliding:**

In addition to the general guidelines for travel agent and tour operators, following additional guidelines shall be applicable to the Paragliding Operators:

- i. Only those operators registered with Department of Tourism and Civil Aviation shall be permitted to operate paragliding in Sikkim.
- ii. All tourists need to pre-book the joy ride 24 Hrs before in order to enable the operators to schedule the flights as per social distancing norms.
- iii. The operators shall ensure that the tourist intending to book a joyride has a valid travel card. The tourists without a valid travel card shall not be permitted to fly
- iv. Thermal screening of tourists shall be mandatory before the flight.
- v. Dos and Don'ts shall be provided by the Agency to the guest while booking of the joy ride.
- vi. Operators are advised to introduce Adventure sports cover Insurance for guests, pilots and Take Off Marshal
- vii. Provision of hand wash, sanitizer to be made available at all the take off, landing, and common areas.
- viii. First aid kits, oxygen cans and emergency vehicles should be provisioned at the Base at all times for any emergency evacuations/ exigencies.
- ix. Brake Toggles, helmets, glider seats/other equipment like GoPro sticks to be sanitize after each flight
- x. Agency shall maintain the records of contact details –phone numbers, hotel address of all the guest undertaking the joyride.
- xi. Sikkim Paragliding Association shall furnish a report of client records to the Office of the Director(Adv) DoT & CAv GOS, on a weekly basis.

**B (VIII): PROTOCOLS FOR HANDLING COVID SUSPECTED /POSITIVE GUESTS:**

The following protocols are as per the guidelines provided by Ministry of Health and Family Welfare for handling Suspected & COVID-19 positive cases. There should be a Rapid Response Leader in every accommodation unit who should be in close communication with Department of Tourism to obtain information about any revision in guidelines by the Central Government.

- i. Place the ill person in the isolation room, away from others. Provide a mask/face cover till such time he/she is examined by a doctor.
- ii. Immediately inform the nearest medical facility (hospital/clinic) or call the state or district helpline.
- iii. Suspect case, if assessed by health authorities as moderate to severe, will be treated as per health protocol in appropriate health facility.
- iv. The State Health Department and the District Administration shall be requisitioned and to undertake the listing of contacts, and the concerned Accommodation unit should provide the necessary support.
- v. The necessary actions for contact tracing and disinfection of the accommodation unit will be expedited in such cases.
- vi. The State Health Department will have the final authority on necessary action to be taken for effective management in such cases.

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## **ADDITIONAL GUIDELINES**

In addition to the principal guidelines and the general guidelines as elaborated at A & B above, following additional function shall be put in place for efficient management of the Sikkim Tourism Unlock1.0

**1: MONITORING & ENFORCEMENT:**

District Collectors, Subdivisional Magistrates and the Block Development Officers along with field level officers of the Tourism Department shall monitor and ensure that all guidelines and SOPs are complied by the accommodation units, tourism service providers as well as the tourists. For this purpose, the additional enforcement officers to be given executive magisterial powers and be empowered to take necessary action.

**2: COVID CARE FACILITY:**

Each cluster of accommodation units to have at least one designated COVID Care Facility, preferably volunteered by the stakeholders of the district, for management of COVID positive/ symptomatic cases. The facility will be developed to complement the existing facilities of the Health Department.

**3: COVID CARE VEHICLE:**

Each district to have at least one vehicle designated as COVID Care Vehicle with all necessary equipments installed, to ferry the COVID Positive cases to the nearest COVID Care Facility for further management and treatment. The tour operators/travel agents to be encouraged to make such provisions in case of emergencies.

**4: TOURIST INFORMATION CENTRES:**

All TIC shall be Wi-Fi/ Hotspot enabled with proper Internet connectivity in order to enable the TIC staff to provide all necessary assistance to the tourist and the tourism stakeholders for all online mode functions. All TIC staff will be adequately trained not only in Web Portal updation but also on all SOPs and guidelines issued by the Department so that they are able to disseminate firsthand information to the guests as well as the stakeholder enterprises.

**5: CONTROL ROOM:**

There shall be a dedicated Central Monitoring and Records Team stationed at the Head Office of the DOT & Cav, Paryatan Bhawan which will monitor, coordinate with the District Administration and maintain the daily records of all tourist arrivals/ departure and movement in the state during the Unlock1.0.

**6: Following areas will remain closed for tourist activities during the Unlock 1.0**

- 1) Ropeway Rides (Gangtok & Namchi).
- 2) Excursion to Nathula Pass.

**7. All other aspects related to health protocol, handling of Covid 19 cases shall be governed as per existing policies/ guidelines of Health & Home Departments, Government of Sikkim.**